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THOMAS HOBBS'S *ELEMENTS OF LAW*
AND HIS *THIRD OBJECTIONS*
TO DESCARTES'S *MEDITATIONS*

INTRODUCTION

Discourse of the Method by René Descartes—one of the most influential works in the history of philosophy—was published in 1637, yet only eight years before, as we learn from the author's letters, he had developed a conception for his *Meditations*.¹ Its publication, however, had been postponed on account of unfavourable circumstances for more than 10 years, until 1641. One of the ways to earn the favour of the readers was by the distribution of copies of the work to various circles of scholars with a request to make detailed comments, which was done by Father Mersenne, a staunch supporter of Descartes in the endeavours to propagate new philosophy. This way the author of the *Meditations* wanted to protect himself against inevitable criticism. The polemics thus conceived, along with the answers by Descartes himself, were to be an integral part of the work, from now on known as the *Objections*. And although this stratagem did not fully accomplish its mission, it must be admitted that if we perceive it as an attempt to get the author of the *Meditations* to specify his opinions in more detail and dispel at least some of the ambiguities, then it was worth its while.

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¹ Cf. Stefan ŚWIEŻAWSKI, Foreword to *Medytacje o pierwszej filozofii*, by René DESCARTES, transl. Maria and Kazimierz Ajdukiewicz (Warsaw: PWN, 1958), vii–xxxi. It is about Descartes's letter to Wilhelm Gibieuf dated July 18, 1629 and to Marin Mersenne, dated April 15, 1630 (not July as Świeżawski claims). Cf. *Œuvres de Descartes*, ed. Charles Adam and Paul Tannery, vol. 1, *Correspondance: Avril 1622 – Février 1638* (Paris: L. Cerf, 1897), 16ff, 135ff.

One of the recipients of the said copies was Thomas Hobbes who, as is characteristic of the later polemic of the two philosophers, would never be mentioned by name in it by Descartes. However, the reason for that was not the fact that he formulated the *Objections* anonymously as Descartes quickly saw through their author. It was more about the differences of opinion and animosity between both thinkers.

In this article, I endeavour to present the axis of the dispute and its most important moments. I focus primarily on the analysis of the most important accusations made by Hobbes and the reconstruction of some of his views, which at the time could only be found in *The Elements of Law, Nature, and Politics*. This work was the first major and coherent attempt to address the philosopher's interesting cognitive-theory and social issues; I strive to defend the thesis that understanding the content of *Objections* requires knowledge of this work. The mature form of the work shows that the Englishman already had his views well thought-out and could feel quite confident in formulating from their perspective critical remarks on Descartes's philosophy, to which, it seems, he may have owed quite a lot.

THE BACKGROUND OF *THIRD OBJECTIONS*

In all likelihood, Hobbes came by the *Meditations* in December 1640. He sent back his critical remarks, later referred to as *The Third set of Objections*, to Mersenne, who was an intermediary in the entire process, in January the following year. They would be published after seven months, on 28th August, together with the main text. They are composed of 16 objections which, frankly speaking, do not constitute a whole, and which do not relate to the *Meditations* as to a complete and coherent work. The criticism is levelled at the issues related to the manner in which Descartes understands ideas, the way we acquire the idea of God, soul, or angels, but critical remarks also concern the issue of the validity of the passage from acknowledging that "I exist" to stating that "I am a mind, or intelligence, or intellect, or reason," as well as the issue of the existence of objects and nature of reasoning. In all cases Hobbes quotes fragments of Descartes's work and makes direct references to them. We do not know anything about the layout of the objections, whether they were sent in that shape or were ordered that way by Mersenne or Descartes. There is every indication that, firstly, the exchange of opinions between both philosophers suffered on account of Hobbes's inability to relate to the answers to his objections, and secondly, it leaves the reader demanding some more. Both these circumstances add to the fact that the substantive evaluation of the polemic can be extremely different. In literature we can find comments addressed to Hobbes accusing him of misunderstanding the structure of the *Meditations*, as well as its

contents, and criticising his objections as misfired and him as being dogmatic.² On the other hand, there are scholars who see in his objections a well thought-out criticism levelled at particular solutions of Descartes's philosophy, discrediting it, and exposing its weakest elements.³ I advocate the latter standpoint.

The exchange of opinions which took place on account of the preparation of the *Meditations* for print was by no means the first such polemic between the two great thinkers. It was in October 1637 when Hobbes received from Kenelm Digby the said *Discourse of the Method* and the accompanying essays (*Dioptrics*, *Meteorology*, and *Geometry*).⁴ However, he made no written comment with regard to them until November 1640, when he sent Mersenne a 56-page-letter containing a criticism of the first of the essays. Unfortunately, with the exception of a few fragments from Mersenne's later correspondence, this letter has not remained. Reportedly, Descartes gave the letter a very cool reception. In his letter to Mersenne dated January 21, 1641 we read: "I was very surprised by the fact that although the style in which it is written makes its author look clever and learned, he seems to stray from the truth in every single claim which he advances as his own."⁵ And later he relates to Hobbes's objections concerning an alleged use of

² Such a position is held in their works, or at least in their larger parts, by such experts on the subject as Tom Sorell (see Tom SORRELL, "Hobbes's Objections and Hobbes's System," in *Descartes and His Contemporaries: Meditations, Objections, and Replies*, ed. Roger Ariew and Marjorie Grene (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press), 83–96; or Aloysius P. MARTINICH, *Hobbes: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), especially chap. 6 titled "A Decade of Exile, 1641–51 (I)," 161–93.

³ Such a point of view, in turn, is reflected in analyses devoted to these issues in such works as, *inter alia*, Marcus P. ADAMS, "The Wax and the Mechanical Mind: Reexamining Hobbes's Objections to Descartes's *Meditations*," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 22 (2014): 403–24, doi:10.1080/09608788.2014.893226. Incidentally, this is one of the more interesting and coherent statements on the subject, as it largely takes into account Hobbes's deliberations in *The Elements of Law, Natural and Politics*, the terminology used there and the most important distinctions concerning sources of knowledge, its kinds and various conceptions, with which the cognition begins for him, and, which I think is even more valuable, it examines the handwritten notes of Hobbes, Robert Payne and Charles Cavendish to *De Corpore* (dating back to the late 1630s and reaching the date of its publication in 1655) and Edwin CURLEY, "Hobbes versus Descartes," in *Descartes and His Contemporaries: Meditations, Objections, and Replies*, ed. Roger Ariew and Marjorie Grene (Chicago–London: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 97–109. In his comments, however, he describes Hobbes as highly dogmatic.

⁴ Details concerning this first anonymous edition are to be found in Robert Stoothoff's, preface to *Discourse and Essays*, in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, by René DESCARTES, trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 1:109–10.

⁵ Thomas HOBBS, *The Correspondence of Thomas Hobbes*, vol. 1, 1622–1659, ed. Noel Malcolm (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 57.

his terminology by Descartes. The author of the criticism in *Dioptrics* sought for a similarity between his notion of “internal spirit” that was to constitute a kind of material substance of God and human soul, and Descartes’s notion of “subtle matter.” However, the latter, on account of his conservatism and the fear of the Church’s reaction, demonstrated by not publishing *The World*, did not wish to acknowledge such an understanding of God and soul, what he states in the subsequent parts of the letter: “I shall leave aside the initial section on his ‘internal spirit’, and on his corporeal soul and corporeal God, and other things that do not concern me.”⁶ They will both exchange such pleasantries through Mersenne on several other occasions.⁷ Not without significance for the general tone in the comments of both thinkers is their mutual suspiciousness, as Hobbes thought that the manner in which Descartes explained certain issues related to sensual perception was surprisingly similar to his, whereas the other was convinced that by making such accusations Hobbes wanted to gain renown at his expense. Mutual animosity did not, however, stand in the way of substantive discussion on the pages of *Meditations*, where bitter and acrimonious words or even derision were reduced to a few indifferent remarks or comments. Despite the first failed attempt to arrange the meeting between the two philosophers due to Hobbes’s fault in 1644 in Paris, thanks to the efforts of Mersenne it was finally arranged in 1648, however

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ And no wonder since Descartes’s answers to Hobbes’s allegations are commented on as follows: “that is not a sufficient reason to disagree with me, but rather a reason to why he should consider the matter more carefully,” see HOBBS, *The Correspondence*, 71. It is hard to believe that Descartes could bear such remarks with serenity. In the end, he cannot stand it any longer, and in a letter to Mersenne he writes as follows: “Otherwise, having read at leisure that last paper by the Englishman, I have become completely convinced of the truth of the judgment which I expressed about him in my letter to you fortnight ago; and I think it best if I have nothing to do with him and therefore refrain from replying to him. For if his character is as I suspect, we could scarcely communicate without becoming enemies. So it is better for us, him and me, to leave it here. I also beg you to communicate as little as possible to him of those of my opinions which you know, and which have not appeared in print. For unless I am very much mistaken, he is aiming to make his reputation at my expense, and by devious means” (HOBBS, *The Correspondence*, 100). It would seem that all the polemics between the two great philosophers could end here, but perhaps, as Gianluca Mori proves, Descartes continued his discussion with the English philosopher. In fact, on May 19, 1641, Mersenne sent him accusations from an anonymous author concerning the issue of his understanding of ideas, which not only resembles to a large extent the criticism previously put forward by Hobbes, but are equally well targeted at the weakest points of Descartes’s views. Given the close relationship between Hobbes and Mersenne and the latter’s love for the truth, the hypothesis of the anonymous author’s recognition of Hobbes seems to have reasonable grounds. On this subject see Gianluca MORI, “Hobbes, Descartes, and Ideas: A Secret Debate,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 50, 2 (2012): 197–212, doi:10.1353/hph.2012.0021.

the meeting proved to be a failure.⁸ It was not until the author of *Leviathan* was nearing the end of his life, he who at the beginning of his philosophical career had only started to aspire to reach the status of the already renowned position of Descartes, that he showed favour to Descartes.

At the time when Hobbes was writing his *Objections*, he was not yet a widely renowned thinker, and his greatest works were yet to be written. But even then, during his travels to the Continent he frequented the circles of thinkers related to Mersenne, who valued him; he met Galileo and kept in touch with the scientists associated with William Cavendish (1593–1676) the Earl of Newcastle. It was the so-called “Welbeck academy,” from the name of the earl’s manor Welbeck Abbey in north Nottinghamshire, which included Newcastle’s brother, Sir Charles Cavendish (a mathematician), Walter Warner (also a mathematician) and Robert Payne (a natural philosopher and experimentalist). To the latter has recently been ascribed the authorship of *A Short Tract on First Principles*, a work written in the spirit of Aristotelianism, which was originally attributed to Hobbes.⁹ Thanks to a close cooperation with Sir Charles Cavendish, Hobbes became interested in the late 1630s in optics, physics, and psychology. At that time, he also found for the Earl of Newcastle *Dialogo sopra i due massimi sistemi del mondo (The Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems)* by Galileo Galilei. He showed a lively interest in the issues related to the cognitive processes. He would develop them in more detail in the first part of *The Elements of Law* titled *Human Nature*. It would also become a basis for us to reconstruct his philosophical views of that time, which we find in the third set of objections. None of his works of that time, either *A Short Tract on First Principles*, or those that were only sketched out or planned, were in any degree close to the issues broached in *Meditations*.

THE CONTENT OF *THIRD OBJECTIONS*

If we were not to consider them in the wider context of Hobbes’s philosophical legacy, the *Objections* make an impression of incoherent and not very well-thought-out remarks. Yet, it is a rather superficial evaluation. Among them

⁸ I repeat this information after MARTINICH, *Hobbes: A Biography*, 171.

⁹ On the subject of the authorship of this work, see Richard TUCK, “Hobbes and Descartes,” in *Perspectives on Thomas Hobbes*, ed. Graham A. J. Rogers and Alan Ryan (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 11–41, as well as Timothy RAYLOR, “Hobbes, Payne, and *Short Tract on First Principles*,” in *The Historical Journal* 44, no. 1 (2001): 29–58, doi:10.1017/S0018246X01001650. It was Tuck who first questioned the authorship of *Short Tract on First Principles*. Recognising the validity of this thesis, I do not analyse in this article the content of this short work.

we find an objection against Descartes which says that he does not contribute to philosophy with anything new but the repetition of cliché deliberations of ancient thinkers about the illusion of sensual cognition, as well as lesser critical remarks concerning the differentiation between the essence and existence, the issue of God that deceives people, the lack of precision when determining what an error is. Moreover, the question is raised regarding the insufficient precision of his argumentation where he uses such metaphorical expressions as “a great light in the intellect.” Apart from all that, there are only two major groups of objections left in which Hobbes exactly knows what he objects to, against whom, and why. The first group relates to the determination of the thinking thing. In as much as Hobbes agrees here with Descartes that “I am a thinking thing,” he contradicts the statement that such a thinking thing could be defined as “mind, or intelligence, or intellect, or reason”. He argues that one may not reduce the subject to one of its acts, they may not be equated or otherwise it would be possible to say: “I am walking, therefore I am a walk.” Besides, in Hobbes’s view, the legitimation of existence of a thinking thing, or substance which has cognitive abilities, does not preclude its being corporeal. It is quite obvious to him that an incorporeal substance simply cannot exist, or at least we may never experience it. Descartes, on the other hand, accepts the contradiction of this statement without proving it. He thereby introduces a dualism of substance which Hobbes would never agree with. The author of the *Meditations* would reply that he had not resolved this issue until *Meditation Six*, which is true, and it was only there that he tried to find the answer to the question about the nature of the thinking thing. In *Meditation Two*, to a fragment of which Hobbes is relating, he described a thinking substance only through the so-called acts of thought, among which are also “understanding, willing, imagining, having sensory perceptions, and so on: these all fall under the common concept of thought, or perception, or consciousness.” We ascribe them to the mind, the thinking substance, yet it is important not to confuse them with the acts of extended substance. However, Descartes equated the acts of the subject with the subject itself which, according to Hobbes, not only makes it easier for him to prove the existence of subjects of such acts as doubting or thinking as they themselves assume the existence of such a subject, but it leads to the acceptance of the fact that the subject is something material, i.e., corporeal, as only this can be thought of as the subject of an act. It thus can immediately be seen how such an interpretation of the thinking substance by Descartes is far from Hobbes’s understanding of reasoning as computation.¹⁰ With such a disparity

¹⁰ See Thomas HOBBS, *The English Works of Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury*, vol. 1, *Elements of Philosophy. The First Section, Concerning Body, Written in Latin by Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury*,

between comprehending the nature of reason there was no chance that a plane of understanding could ever be found.

The second group of objections, which at the same time constitutes the main axis of the dispute between both philosophers, regards the notion of idea understood in a broad sense. Let us have a closer look starting with the fourth objection, which can perfectly introduce the reader to the main point of the debate.

Imagining (i.e. having an idea) is very different from mentally conceiving (i.e. reasoning one's way to the conclusion that something is, or exists). But Descartes hasn't explained what the difference is. ... Now, suppose it turned out that reasoning is nothing but the joining together and linking of names or labels by means of the verb 'is' — what should we say then? It would follow that the inferences in our reasoning tell us nothing about the nature of things, but merely tell us about the labels applied to them — specifically, tell us whether we are combining the names of things in compliance with the arbitrary conventions that we have laid down for what they are to signify.¹¹

Hobbes does not assume anything like that: he simply takes it for granted, as he believes that reasoning depends on names, names depend on imagination, and imagination depends on movements in corporeal organs. Therefore, he assumes that the mind is nothing but “movements of various parts of an organic body.” For that reason, trying to find cognitive powers akin to intellect in his philosophy would be all in vain. It is superfluous as, although all the operations in the mind are performed on conceptions which are differently understood by him, the majority of them have a sensual nature.¹² According to Hobbes, Descartes is not accurate in explaining the differences between imagining something and depicting it with the use of mind. Besides, Hobbes is not favourable to his understanding of the idea. He does not understand why Descartes extends the scope of the application of the term “idea” to reasoning contents of cognition which have no direct support in sensual experience. The wax example invoked by Descartes is the best illustration. On one hand we possess his ideas that relate to shape, smell, and other sensual qualities through which we are unable, as the philosopher argues, to experience its true nature, that which the wax is, but on the other we can express its essence through the insight of the mind itself. This sounds like an outlandish idea

ed. William Molesworth (London: John Bohn, 1839), 1:3.

¹¹ Thomas HOBBS, *Third Objections*, in *Objections to the Meditations and Descartes's Replies*, by Rene Descartes, transl. Jonathan Bennett, p. 45, http://www.earlymoderntexts.com/assets/pdfs/descartes1642_2.pdf.

¹² On Hobbes's understanding of conceptions, see Krzysztof WAWRZONKOWSKI, “O wieloznaczności terminu ‘pojęcie’ w filozofii Hobbesa,” *Idea. Studia nad strukturą i rozwojem pojęć filozoficznych* 27, no. 1 (2015): 255–70, doi:10.15290/idea.2015.27.t.t.15.

to Hobbes, for how could we reach the essence of wax by only linking together names by means of the word *is*. Descartes consciously answers that the difference between imagination and experiencing through the mind is enormous, as imagining a pentagon, i.e. a sensual visualisation of its form is nothing like the understanding of a principle by which it had been constructed. Besides, he does not agree with Hobbes's statement that reasoning is a linkage of names, as according to him it is the linkage of things that have been denoted by those names. The meaning itself is not a question of contract. The mind itself is not a movement and all that is directly expressed by it he called an idea, which he had stated for the last time. Such an understanding, however, is unacceptable for Hobbes.

It is no wonder then that in the subsequent objections, concentrating on the difference between how he and his opponent understand ideas, Hobbes inflicts more blows by posing questions addressed at how Descartes arrives at the ideas of God, soul, angel, and even substance. He argues that such ideas cannot be obtained at all and no-one has ever obtained them. Proving the existence of God on the basis of the idea that we possess about Him, or the existence of substance with the application of a mysterious term of representative reality, or a great light in the intellect he deems absurd. And although he admits that on the path of deduction one may arrive at the acceptance of an eternal cause that has no other before it, yet it cannot be equated with possessing the idea of that cause. He thus understands that God may exist, but this idea can only be arrived at through deduction and not through ideas. Therefore, it is not possible to speak of experiencing the attributes of God, for how else can we come into possession of the ideas of His infinity, independence, omnipotence, or wisdom, as the ideas should relate only to what is presented by them and such attributes cannot be demonstrated by any sensual way. What can be experienced in that way then? What is the cognition process based on such ideas like? And last but not least, what is its cognitive value? Let us take a closer look at the answers that Hobbes gives to that question in *The Elements of Law, Natural and Politic*.

*THIRD OBJECTIONS VS THE ELEMENTS OF LAW,
NATURAL AND POLITIC*

This work, which Hobbes called *My little Treatise in English*, was completed on 9 May 1640, but was not officially printed until 1650. Until that time it had been circulating in an unprinted form among his closest acquaintances. It was comprised of two independent parts titled respectively *Human Nature* and *De Corpore Politico*. In his critical edition, Tönnies wrote that it contained “the earliest and shortest, yet

at the same time a well-matured, conception of a social and political doctrine”¹³ he had ever come across, including the conception contained in *Leviathan*. This work became a reason why its author was forced to escape beyond the borders of his home country. There he was warmly welcomed by Mersenne and invited to co-author the *Objections*.

When looking for the philosophical grounds of the objections that Hobbes addressed to Descartes in *The Elements of Law*, one should pay attention to their first part titled *Human Nature*, and the epistemological issues in it, above all including the manner in which the philosopher explains the course of the cognitive process, types of the powers of mind and reasoning, as well as the differences between the discourse of the mind and the discourse of the tongue. Most of these issues are related to the term “conceptions,”¹⁴ which, in Hobbes’s early work, plays the role of a central technical term with a wide scope of meanings. In later works the sightings of this term are rather rare as the philosopher replaces it with more precise and detailed terms. The term only functions as a common definition for several types of the content of the mind, *inter alia*, images, ideas, phantasms, or just thoughts.

Let us have a closer look at the fragment of *The Elements of Law*, where Hobbes introduces this term.

For the understanding of what I mean by the power cognitive, we must remember and acknowledge that there be in our minds continually certain images or conceptions of the things without us, insomuch that if a man could be alive, and all the rest of the world annihilated, he should nevertheless retain the image thereof, and of all those things which he had before seen and perceived in it; every man by his own experience knowing that the absence or destruction of things once imagined, doth not cause the absence or destruction of the imagination itself. This imagery and representations of the qualities of things without us is that we call our cognition, imagination, ideas, notice, conception, or knowledge of them. And the faculty, or power, by which we are capable of such knowledge, is that I here call power cognitive, or conceptive, the power of knowing or conceiving.¹⁵

¹³ Ferdinand TÖNNIES, ed., Preface to *The Elements of Law, Natural and Politic: To which Are Subjoined Selected Extracts from Unprinted Mss. of Thomas Hobbes* (London: Elibron Classics, 2007), x.

¹⁴ The source of this term is to be found among such Latin words as *conceptio* or *concipere*, i.e., understanding, imagining and grasping, but also in *capio*, i.e., to grasp, capture, which, together with the prefix *con*, means grasping, capturing something together. It seems that the Latin genesis of this term reflects the intention of Hobbes, who tries to convey with its help all the contents of the mind.

¹⁵ HOBBS, *The Elements of Law*, 2.

This means that Hobbes juxtaposes and equates images and conceptions. They are formed the moment when external bodies interact with the sensory organ, which means that they are nothing but sensual impressions.¹⁶ And such is the first type of conceptions and, at the same time, a foundation of man's knowledge about the surrounding world.¹⁷ Of course, this outside world is nothing else but motions which seem to evoke these appearances.

The other type of "conceptions" are "imagination," also referred to as decaying senses. They include dreams, fiction, phantasms, afterimages, appearances, and remembrance. They are particularly important to him as they constitute the foundation to all his deliberations. For that, he claims, no intellect is imperative, no other power but imagination or the consecutive strings of conceptions:

The succession of conceptions in the mind, their series or consequence of one after another, may be casual and incoherent, as in dreams for the most part; and it may be orderly, as when the former thought introduceth the latter; and this is discourse of the mind. But because the word "discourse" is commonly taken for the coherence and consequence of words, I will (to avoid equivocation) call it DISCURSION.¹⁸

Among its types Hobbes enumerates ranging, sagacity, reminiscence, whereas owing to remembrance, he may also include expectation and presumption. Most importantly, this discourse of mind is distinct from the discourse of tongue, which assumes the attribution of arbitrarily established marks to the respective

¹⁶ See the following excerpt: "Originally all conceptions proceed from the actions of the thing itself, whereof it is the conception. Now when the action is present, the conception it produceth is called SENSE, and the thing by whose action the same is produced is called the OBJECT of sense. By our several organs we have several conceptions of several qualities in the objects; for by sight we have a conception or image composed of colour or figure, which is all the notice and knowledge the object imparteth to us of its nature by the eye. By hearing we have a conception called sound, which is all the knowledge we have of the quality of the object from the ear. And so the rest of the senses also are conceptions of several qualities, or natures of their objects" (HOBBS, *The Elements of Law*, 3)

¹⁷ Hobbes will express this view also in *Leviathan*: "CONCERNING the thoughts of man, I will consider them first singly, and afterwards in train or dependence upon one another. Singly, they are every one a representation or appearance of some quality, or other accident of a body without us, which is commonly called an object. Which object worketh on the eyes, ears, and other parts of man's body, and by diversity of working produceth diversity of appearances. The original of them all is that which we call sense (for there is no conception in a man's mind which hath not at first, totally or by parts, been begotten upon the organs of sense). The rest are derived from that original," see Thomas HOBBS, *The English Works of Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury*, ed. William Molesworth, vol. 3, *Leviathan or The Matter, Form, and Power of a Common-Wealth Ecclesiastical and Civil* (London: John Bohn, 1839), 1.

¹⁸ HOBBS, *The Elements of Law*, 13 (chap. 4).

conceptions. Such marks may include objects discerned with the senses as well as human voices, which we experience through senses. This way they themselves also fall under the category of conceptions, whereas at the same time they enable the transition from the private tongue of the reasoning of the mind to the public tongue. This in turn, on the one hand, enables communication with other people, and on the other facilitates memorisation and invocation of one's thoughts as well as doing and disseminating science.

Given that the discursions are founded on images, not on notions, Hobbes does not need to distinguish any separate power of mind which would operate on the latter and may effect a dichotomous division of powers into "cognitive or imaginative or conceptive and motive."¹⁹ Therefore, in the later *De Corpore*, reasoning will be defined as computation: "By RATIOCINATION," we read, "I mean *computation*. Now to compute, is either to collect the sum of many things that are added together, or to know what remains when one thing is taken out of another. *Ratiocination*, therefore, is the same with *addition* and *subtraction*."²⁰ And in his opinion anything can be added or subtracted, as we are not speaking here merely about numbers, but also of lines, figures, angles, proportions, time intervals, degrees of speed, power, as well as quantities, bodies, qualities, motion, notions, names, speeches, and utterances. Therefore, reason is not limited in its actions such as stating, contradicting, or reasoning to operate on names, it also counts well everything that is represented by them and what imagination brings forward, i.e., the images of what is larger or smaller, nearer and further, what is slow and what is fast, etc. However, its job is not finished on statements or comparisons, because if the reasoning regards the thoughts and not names, they may concern, as I have already mentioned, various predictions, assumptions and conjectures.

Thus portrayed, the relationship between conceptions and marks yields two types of knowledge,

whereof the one is nothing else but sense, or knowledge original ..., and remembrance of the same; the other is called science or knowledge of the truth of propositions, and how things are called, and is derived from understanding. Both of these sorts are but experience; the former being the experience of the effects of things that work upon us from without; and the latter the experience men have of the proper use of names in language. And all experience being ... but remembrance, all knowledge is remembrance: and of the former, the register we keep in books, is called history, but the registers of the latter are called the sciences."²¹

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.

²⁰ HOBBS, *Elements of Philosophy. The First Section*, 3.

²¹ HOBBS, *The Elements of Law*, 24.

However, it must be added here that the obviousness of the latter sort of knowledge is not merely dependent on a correctly performed implication within it, but is directly related to the acquaintance with the conceptions that have been assigned marks which provided the basis for the results.²² This on the other hand is clearly seen in Hobbes's statement in the fourth objection to the *Meditations*, which points to the existence of a link between conceptions, and maybe even their source, and a mechanical reaction of the body to the motion from outside and names: "If this is so, as it may well be—it will follow that reasoning depends on names, that names depend on the imagination, and that imagination depends (as I believe it actually does) on the motions of parts of our bodies. So the bottom line will be this: the mind is nothing more than the movements of various parts of an organic body." The consequence of this link apparently is an entirely mechanical manner of explaining the functioning of the mind. How could there be found ideas of non-material, non-corporeal objects?

Perhaps the solution could be found in the third type of the conceptions discussed here. For Hobbes, in addition to sensual experiences and imaginations, points to yet another kind. However, contrary to the other two, it does not seem to have anything in common with images. For it is something that the philosopher could not find a name for and, as it may be conjectured, can be barely supportable in his philosophy. This non-sensual type of conceptions is directly related to the act of understanding, as it is only when we understand something that we acquire a conception of it, whereas if we do not, such a conception is not in our possession. Chiliagon from the *Objections* seems to be an ideal match here. We can understand what it is, but we cannot imagine it. Unfortunately, understanding is not very thoroughly discussed by Hobbes in *The Elements of Law*. We read here: "It is therefore a great ability in a man, out of the words, contexture, and other circumstances of language, to deliver himself from equivocation, and to find out the true meaning of what is said: and this is it we call UNDERSTANDING."²³ Whereas in *Leviathan* we can find a remark which elaborates on it: "When a man, upon the hearing of any speech, hath those thoughts which the words of that speech and their connexion were ordained and constituted to signify, then he is said to understand it; *understanding* being nothing else but conception caused by

²² Hobbes illustratively declares: "For if the words alone were sufficient, a parrot might be taught as well to know a truth, as to speak it. Evidence is to truth, as the sap is to the tree, which so far as it creepeth along with the body and branches, keepeth them alive; when it forsaketh them, they die. For this evidence, which is meaning with our words, is the life of truth; without it truth is nothing worth" (*The Elements of Law*, 25).

²³ HOBBS, *The Elements of Law*, 21.

speech.”²⁴ And a little bit further on: “WHEN man reasoneth, he does nothing else but conceive a sum total, from *addition* of parcels; or conceive a remainder, from *subtraction* of one sum from another; which, if it be done by words, is conceiving of the consequence of the names of all the parts, to the name of the whole; or from the names of the whole and one part, to the name of the other part.”²⁵ If we narrow down understanding to the ability to refer names to conceptions understood as senses or imaginations, then will we at all be able to say that we understand what chiliagon is? I am afraid not. Therefore, the third type of conceptions, although it is often related to the other two, must be different from them in terms of its nature. In this case, it is all about immateriality, non-corporeality or just the lack of extension. Hobbes certainly could not have equated such a conception with idea. For idea can only represent that which is material.

What is then this conception which, as Hobbes explained when he defined the name,²⁶ appears when we hear it? It seems to me that on the grounds of his philosophy it may only be an image of a given thing, as the other sort of knowledge I mentioned, science, is based upon the previously obtained observational material and experience that comes from the proper use of language. The latter is only possible on condition that we have the memory of things that the name relates to. And although names, contrary to things, may be general and even abstract, they still should be breakable into more simple ones whose sensual origin we can point to. Therefore, chiliagon can be broken down to more simple components, but we cannot imagine how they can be reassembled. We may point to the characteristics of this figure and compute the interrelations of its components, yet we will not be able to obtain its idea. Similarly, we are unable to obtain the idea of God, soul, or angel. Not in the sense of idea proposed by Hobbes.

CONCLUSIONS

I am convinced that the objections raised by Hobbes did not benefit Descartes at all. He does not seem to have drawn any positive conclusions from them for his philosophical concept, and he certainly did not modify it under their influence. Perhaps they showed him the dangers inherent in his own system of views of the materialistic and mechanistic vision of the world. However, the tone of his speech

²⁴ HOBBS, *Leviathan or The Matter*, 28.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 29.

²⁶ See the following excerpt: “NAME or APPELLATION therefore is the voice of a man, arbitrarily imposed, for a mark to bring to his mind some conception concerning the thing on which it is imposed” (HOBBS, *The Elements of Law*, 18.)

and the persistent defence of his position do not make it possible to prove it. Nor does it appear that the publication of the objections and responses to them resulted in persuading readers that the French thinker had dealt with the criticism of his own views from a more consistent position of materialism than his own. On the contrary, it even seems that some of the accusations made seem to have exposed very clearly the weaknesses of his system, an example of which is the identification of the subject with his act. Yet proving his existence through demonstrating the fact of his taking of action is based on the most important elements of the Cartesian riddle: the existence of God, the world, the value of knowledge about the latter or even the nature of the mind and the Creator Himself.

At this point, one should consider whether Hobbes's comments could have influenced Descartes's concept. But could the views in which metaphysical assumptions are so different and networks of notions so incompatible in any way influence one another? It seems that on the basis of the materialistic understanding of the world and the mechanistic explanation of the functioning of the human body, including the course of some cognitive processes, it was possible—yet, this concerned physiology. The differences could concern specific solutions here. Thus, they could play a secondary role in the entire dispute and rather result in mutual inspiration. However, the discussion focused on the issues related to ideas, which became a bone of contention and made it impossible to reconcile both positions.

A different understanding of the nature of ideas made any agreement on issues such as determining the essence of the substance, the mind, cognition, or the existence of God impossible. Descartes's blatant nominalism of Hobbes certainly made it impossible for the latter to understand the philosophical system of the French philosopher in all its complexity. The dualism of substance present in it was unacceptable to him, while the very concept of thinking substance was absurd. Nor could Hobbes agree to the view that an idea could be something other than a sensual image, a reaction of the collision of two types of movement, from the outside and resistance of the internal organs themselves. The idea of God was something incomprehensible to him, and no inherent light of reason could change that. On the other hand, Descartes did not even try to understand Hobbes's research perspective. It seems that he did not take his objections too seriously, as the entire reaction to them is imbued with impatience and resentment. Perhaps he expected more from him. In such a situation, both of them remained to entrench themselves in their positions and watch their opponent from afar. No cooperation could be established here, no thread of understanding.

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THOMAS HOBBS'S *ELEMENTS OF LAW* AND HIS *THIRD OBJECTIONS*
TO DESCARTES'S *MEDITATIONS*

Summary

In this article I endeavour to present the axis of the dispute between Hobbes and Descartes on the ground of *Meditation*, and its most important moments. I focus primarily on the analysis of the most important accusations made by Hobbes and the reconstruction of some of his views, which at the time could only be found in *The Elements of Law, Nature, and Politics*. This work was the first major and coherent attempt to speak out on cognitive-theory and social issues; I strive to defend the thesis that understanding the content of *Objections* requires knowledge of this work. The mature form of the work shows that the Englishman already had his views well thought-out and could feel quite confident in formulating from their perspective critical remarks on Descartes's philosophy, to which, it seems, he may have owed quite a lot.

Keywords: Hobbes; Descartes; Elements of Law; conceptions; objections; idea; Meditations.

ELEMENTY PRAWA THOMASA HOBBSA A JEGO ZARZUTY TRZECIE
DO MEDYTACJI KARTEZJUSZA

Streszczenie

W niniejszym artykule staram się przedstawić oś sporu pomiędzy Hobbesem i Descartesem na gruncie *Medytacji*, oraz jego najważniejsze momenty. Skupiam się przede wszystkim na analizie najważniejszych postawionych przez Hobbesa zarzutów i rekonstrukcji wybranych jego poglądów, które wówczas można było odnaleźć jedynie w *The Elements of Law, Natural and Politic*. Dzieło to było jego pierwszą większą i spójną próbą wypowiedzi na zagadnienia teoriopoznawcze i społeczne; staram się bronić tezy, że zrozumienie treści *Zarzutów* wymaga znajomości owego dzieła. Dojrzała forma dzieła świadczy o tym, że Anglik już wówczas miał swoje poglądy przemyślane i mógł czuć się dość pewnie formułując z ich perspektywy uwagi krytyczne względem filozofii Descartes'a, której jak się wydaje mógł on niejedno zawdzięczać.

Słowa kluczowe: Hobbes; Kartezjusz; Descartes; Elementy Prawa; pojęcia; zarzuty; idea; Medytacje.